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Davis, Charles

Farm to market roads

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# Farm to Market Roads

A Plan for Their Improvement by Extending Federal Aid and Providing Joint Participation of Federal Government, State and County

By CHARLES DAVIS, C. E.

Life Member and Member Legislative Committee, American Road Builders Association; Life Member American Automobile Association; Member National County Roads Planning Commission; Founder, Trustee and President National Highways Association

**R**OADS are used most every day by most everybody. They are certainly used more by more people than any other public work paid for by the people and free to the people. They are therefore probably as important to the people as any other one thing. Being so universally used and being everywhere they offer opportunities and advantages that are not so usual with other public works. As they exist in every community, whether small or large, whether densely or sparsely settled, they must be cared for and improved to be of use. Roads therefore offer employment in such care and improvement in every nook and corner of our land. Both skilled and unskilled labor is required in their construction, maintenance and operation. The opportunities for unlimited employment on roads is obvious—and everywhere. Not just in one locality.

Road building and maintenance has become the third industry of the United States. It will, within a few years, surpass every other activity of the nation. But the rolling stock—motor vehicles—passing over our highways is as much a part of the industry and its problems as the rolling stock passing over the roadbed and rails of our railroads. Likewise the great plants producing these motor vehicles are also a part, as much so as the equipment plants of the steam railroads. Therefore from this angle, road building, maintenance and operation now far exceeds any other industry of our country.

But good roads pay for themselves in the building by (a) savings in gasoline, tires and repairs to motor vehicles, (b) by gains in values of real estate, saving of time, etc., (c) by gains in social and recreational life, and (d) gains in our political future to help "bind the States together and thus perpetuate and preserve the Union." But more than that, good roads are the only public work upon which any amount we choose can be spent per annum and at the same time decrease the cost of living by the above savings.

One thus visualizes how easy for us to care for any, and actually all, unemployment which may occur at any time by extending road building as much as may be necessary to eliminate this unemployment.

Federal Aid to 3,078 Counties.—Originally roads were built by the local committees—townships and towns. Then we had county aid followed by



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As a result much has been accomplished in building through state roads and impetus has been given towards local road development to connect with the state systems. This, however, is not enough, especially in the poorer counties lacking in funds and taxing ability. The counties should be helped by the extension of the present Federal Aid law to enable them to secure the needed money. This could be done by the joint participation of the Fed-

eral Government, the state and the county. The Federal fund could be apportioned on some such plan of mileage, area, population, etc., as is Federal Aid now to the states. The money from the states to the counties could be apportioned in some similar manner or could differ in each state according to their needs and conditions among the counties within any given state. The total amount received by a county could be divided, say, one-fourth from the Federal Government, one-fourth from the state and one-half from the county. Maybe third and third alike might be fairer and better. We are only herein setting forth the plan and principles involved and not essential details. They can readily be agreed upon once the principles and plan are adopted.

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Since then the "National County Roads Planning Commission," with Major Farny as Chairman, has been organized by the American Road Builders' Association, the Lee Highway Association and the National Highways Association, and in which the Asphalt Association, the Portland Cement Association, the National Paving Brick Manufacturers' Association, the General Crushed Stone Association, the Standard Oil Company, American Tar

REPRINTED FROM JANUARY, 1930, ROADS AND STREETS

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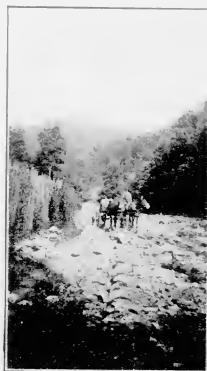
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Remote Scenic Beauty Could Be Reached by Improved County Roads to the Profit of the Permanent Inhabitants

Products Company, Warren Brothers Company, Universal Portland Cement Company, etc., have memberships, which membership will be extended to include others interested in the proper planning for the extension, improvement and beautification of the county roads and their surrounding in our 3,078 counties of our 48 states.

"The purpose of the commission is best set forth in Article III of its organization as follows:

"The purposes of the commission is the development, preservation and beautification of adequate and efficient road systems and their surroundings in such representative counties of the United States of America as may be decided upon by the commission.

"The counties thus accepted for research will be developed through the professional study, survey and planning of their physical and economical assets and necessities toward the end that a complete report with recommendations will be furnished such counties upon which they may proceed to materialize such development."

How the commission will proceed in its work is again best set forth by Article VI showing the method which will guide its activities namely:

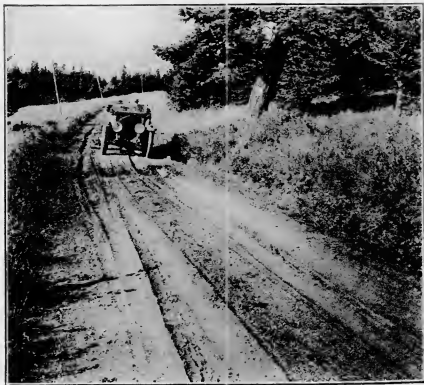
"In order that such development may most quickly and efficiently be available to said counties studied, the National County Roads Planning Commission will in all cases employ competent expert engineers to perform the above mentioned work in the few demonstration counties. In this work they will take into consideration the geography, geology, history, commerce, population, traffic, material resources, future possibilities, present conditions of roads, the necessity of roads in the future, and all other factors which have a bearing on roads.

"A comprehensive plan will be prepared by the commission in each case of a system of county roads not only

available skill pertaining to all phases of road planning, building, maintenance and operation—which skill is furnished without cost—each county gains a service that could not be bought at any price.

Proposed Federal and State Aid to Counties.—A bill for the amendment and extension of the present Federal Aid law is being proposed to furnish funds for county road development. This bill will in no manner interfere with the present Federal Aid for state highways nor reduce the funds now available for that purpose. Much unemployment would thus be taken care of because such legislation would operate through each and every county of the nation for a public improvement which the only one that pays for himself in the doing. For, as previously stated, good roads are the only public work upon which any amount we choose can be spent per annum without being a burden to the taxpayer.

Extension of Federal Aid to our county road systems is justified by the same sound arguments that justified Federal Aid to the states for state highways. Experience has supported these arguments and no one today would advocate the repeal of present Federal Aid. When this aid was first extended but few states had either a highway commission or a plan for state highway systems. Both had to be created by state legislation before a state could participate in Federal Aid. As a result all of the states have created commissions and designated a system of



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The same and even better results can be accomplished through Federal Aid to our 3,078 counties provided it is extended in the same manner but instead of directly to the counties through the state highway commissions, so that whatever plans are determined upon shall be not only approved by the Bureau of Public Roads but likewise by the highway commission of the particular state. This will also, of course, require state participation and financial aid. In other words, when a county has properly organized its own road commission and adopted a plan for its county roads then, but not until then, shall it have the right to gain both state and Federal Aid to help the building of these roads.

Only a very few counties now have such commissions and still fewer adequate plans. The National County Roads Planning Commission have the facilities for helping in such planning. The extension of Federal and state aid to the 3,078 counties will give them, together with their own money, the necessary funds to build and maintain a well devised system of county roads over a period of the next 25 years. The operation of such laws will, as in the case of Federal Aid to the states, result in all our counties properly organizing for county roads as the states did for state highways. This will be accomplished within a very few years after the passing of such laws as was the case with state highway commissions and systems.

By this enormous extension of road improvement throughout our nation we will soon have an adequate system of local farm to market and farm to railroad roads which will add to the prosperity of our marvelous steam railroad system and as a result to all our people.

By these means local road improvement will be hastened, prosperity encouraged and unemployment largely if not completely eliminated.

At a recent meeting of the National County Roads Planning Commission at Washington, at which time the Commission also met President Hoover at the White House, Mr. Charles E. Grubb, County Engineer, New Castle County, Delaware, addressed the Commission in support of Federal Aid to

our 3,078 counties. He expressed the thought of the commission so clearly and forcibly that I asked him to put his remarks in writing, with the request that he authorize me to use them in this article. As a result they are herewith given.

The Value of Federal Aid for Counties.—"The beneficial influence of Fed-

affected by the Federal Aid requirements. On the other hand, weak departments have been strengthened and new departments organized in states where none existed. State standards have definitely been advanced. Development under way in all the states follow definite plans. A splendid network of primary roads is distinctly in



Many of our Forests Are Away from Through Highways. Federal and State Aid County Roads Would Reach Them

eral Aid to states in stimulating highway improvement in every state suggests that equally beneficial results in county highway work would follow Federal Aid to counties. This should mean no reduction in the annual Federal appropriation to states. However, to assure that roads supplementary to the state systems shall be generally improved, it seems appropriate that additional Federal Aid, separate and distinct from that authorized for state highways, be made available for distribution to counties.

"Prior to the adoption of Federal Aid in 1916, few states had highway departments functioning in a satisfactory manner. These departments that were so operating have not been materially

evidence. Without question these changes for national highway progress have been favorably influenced through Federal Aid to states.

Therefore, if Federal Aid has been responsible for these benefits for 48 states, surely the experience justifies the extension for similar benefits in the 3,078 counties with their more than 2,000,000 miles of roads. At the present time 2,700 counties are reported to be in a neglected condition as to highways and without a definite program for relief. The demonstration of the economic value of secondary systems in isolated counties gives evidence as to the possibility of general county highway activities.

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for the immediate future but to satisfy the road needs of the country for many years to come."

The commission is a voluntary one, self constituted and perpetuated for no profit and without compensation to the commissioners or their alternates. The commission raises its own funds from such sources as are interested in furthering this important work and asks each county it serves to furnish a part of the needed money for that county. The county's share is small compared to the total cost. Furthermore, as the commission is composed of the best



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velopment of state highways through Federal Aid and the creation of primary roads in the states should be used in furthering the secondary roads in the counties. Federal Aid, requiring uniform minimum standards, giving financial help, and extending the vast experience of the states and Federal government for the direct assistance of counties can affect radical changes in county highway affairs.

Not only the projects receiving Federal Aid will be influenced by the improved county standards but the disseminated knowledge in the counties,

as it has in the case of states, will guide the expenditures of the total sums at their command. The establishment by the counties of better business methods, supervision by trained highway executives for all highways, and improved standards of construction and maintenance, will be accelerated.

These indirect benefits may really be counted the greatest contribution of Federal Aid for economic highway development. In this manner all roads will be reached at once. Thus, by the extension of Federal Aid to counties, there will be established a national

road policy with all the fundamentals of local self-government retained.

Conclusion.—Such systems of county roads will have from one-half to two-thirds of their cost borne by those communities best able to pay for them—the rich states and the rich cities—where the wealth automatically gravitates and from which part, at least, should be returned to the farmer in the rural districts to enrich them and to once again partly gravitate back to the cities who, after all, prosper the most by any expenditures they make in the country sections of our nation.

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